



Ready Willing and Able (RWA) Consideration for Party Platforms

The Need

Working aged adults with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum expect to participate in the labour force. They want to work in real jobs for real pay. Yet they continue to be separated, segregated, and isolated on the basis of their disability. They continue to face a unique set of barriers to employment, with society pushing an erroneous assumption that, due to their disability, participation in the competitive labour market is not an option. It is now unequivocally acknowledged and demonstrated that with appropriate supports people with intellectual disabilities or on the autism spectrum can successfully enter and thrive in the mainstream labour market.

There are approximately 500,000 working age adults with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum. Unfortunately, they are woefully underrepresented in the paid labour force, with an employment rate hovering at about 25%. A rate which is less than one third that of persons without disabilities, and less than half that of persons with other disabilities.

Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) is a national partnership of Inclusion Canada and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance (CASDA) and their member organizations. It is designed to increase the labour force participation of people with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum. With contribution from RWA, the short to medium term goal would be to increase the employment rate of working age adults with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum to **50%**.

RWA began in 2014 with a novel and innovative approach that is employer-demand driven. RWA focuses on the creation of 'employer demand' rather than 'supply'. RWA focuses on the employer by informing them about the fact that persons with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum make excellent employees and can fill regularly occurring vacancies. A key role of RWA is to raise awareness about the business benefits of inclusive hiring. RWA does and will play a critical role, across all sectors, to assist employers better meet their labour shortages.

The Challenge

COVID-19 has had a devastating (and continuing) impact on the Canadian economy and its labour force. Marginalized groups such as persons with an intellectual disability or ASD have been among the groups hardest hit. Business closures (temporary and permanent), restrictions due to COVID-19, social distancing requirements, etc. have all contributed to a labour force that

more than ever presents significant challenges for persons with an intellectual disability or ASD to either remain in, enter and/or re-enter. We have witnessed employers who are now more hesitant than ever to hire inclusively and diversify their workforces, employees and job seekers who are extremely hesitant to enter or re-enter the work force due to personal safety concerns, and employment agencies who are challenged to provide needed on job supports within the context of a pandemic.

The Solutions

Throughout the pandemic, the RWA model has remained strong and robust, as evidenced by the fact that its Employer Outreach and Employer Engagement elements have exceeded anticipated targets, and interest from potential (and realized) national employers has increased during the later stages of COVID-19. As the Canadian economy slowly recovers from the pandemic, it is vital that RWA remain available to both employers and job seekers over the full trajectory of that recovery to ensure that inclusive and diverse hiring is seen as a necessary component to that recovery and not an effort to be undertaken after recovery is complete. A real opportunity exists in that as employers re-open, it is an opportune time for RWA to further confirm inclusive hiring as a foundational element to recovery. What is now needed is additional time for RWA to continue to work with (more) employers in more communities to ensure that they are connected to this candidate pool, and that employees with an intellectual disability or ASD, and their support agencies, are provided with the supports necessary to take full advantage of the economic recovery. RWA will benefit employers and the labour market during the recovery process. It is imperative that we do not leave anyone behind.

The Impact

Since its inception, RWA has proven itself to be one of the most (perhaps the most) successful national employment program for persons with disabilities in this country. Working specifically with two of the most marginalized populations (e.g. employment rate of less than 25%) the RWA model – employer focused – has proven robust and coherent; has demonstrated the ability to meet the needs of employers and to also work in a complementary partnership with existing community employment agencies across all provinces and territories.

Ready, Willing and Able is having an *impact*. Since 2014, accomplishments include:

- Active in every province and territory of Canada - located in 20 primary communities, with outreach to more than 150 communities across the country.
- Specific outcomes achieved (to end of March 2021):
 - Employer Outreach - 13,199
 - Employer Engagement – 6,252
 - Employment outcomes - 2,943
- All jobs filled were regular vacancies and thus no employer created additional or special jobs.
- Partnership with approximately 250+ local employment agencies across the country.
- Achieved its employment outcomes without the use of wage subsidies.

- 12 national employer partnerships established, expanded and sustained. These partnerships are with Costco, Sodexo, Home Depot, Value Village, Holloway Properties, Purolator, PepsiCo, IBM, BMO, The Brick, Auticon, and Deloitte.
- Awarded the prestigious international "Zero Project Innovative Policy 2017". The award was one of only 12 awarded worldwide.
- Launch of the Inclusive Workplace web site. See www.theinclusiveworkplace.ca and www.lemilieudetravailinclusif.ca

Employment Outcomes by Region

Region	Outreach	Engagement	Employment Outcomes
Atlantic	4359	1347	685
Quebec	1155	815	304
Ontario	1832	1004	443
Prairies	1928	687	167
Western	2975	1563	1018
Territories	950	836	326

The Ask

RWA is currently being funded until March 2022 via the Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. To maintain our current capacity we require \$5M/year.

Additional resources of \$2.5M per year would support an expansion to 10 new communities across the province. We know that this expansion is greatly needed and has been requested by both National and Regional Employers, but requires additional resources.

Job seekers with an intellectual disability or on the autism spectrum are READY, WILLING and ABLE to be employed!